



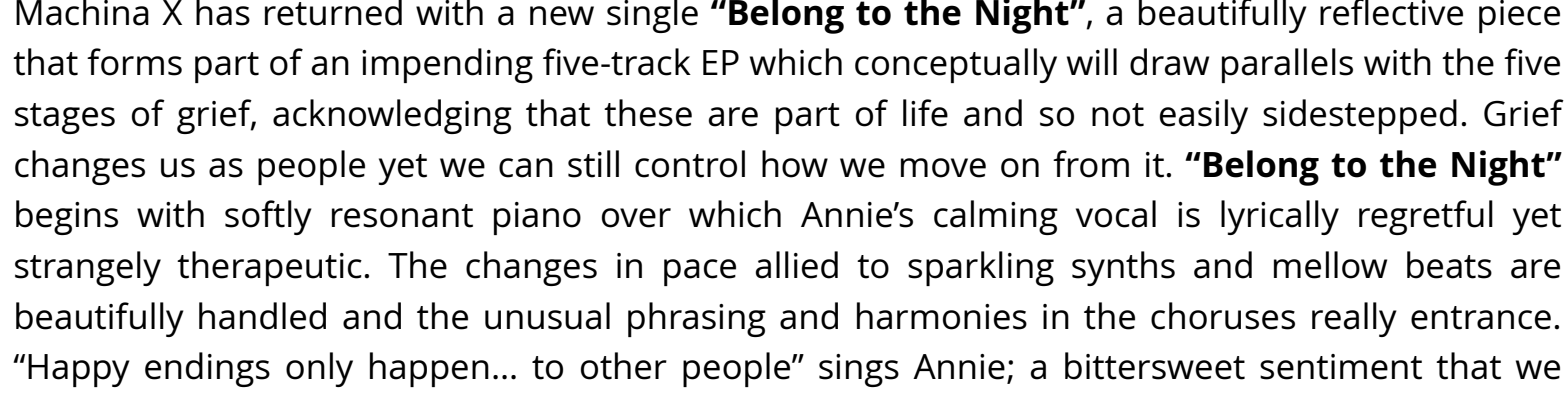
## FIFTY3 FRIDAYS: DIDN'T SEE IT COMING?



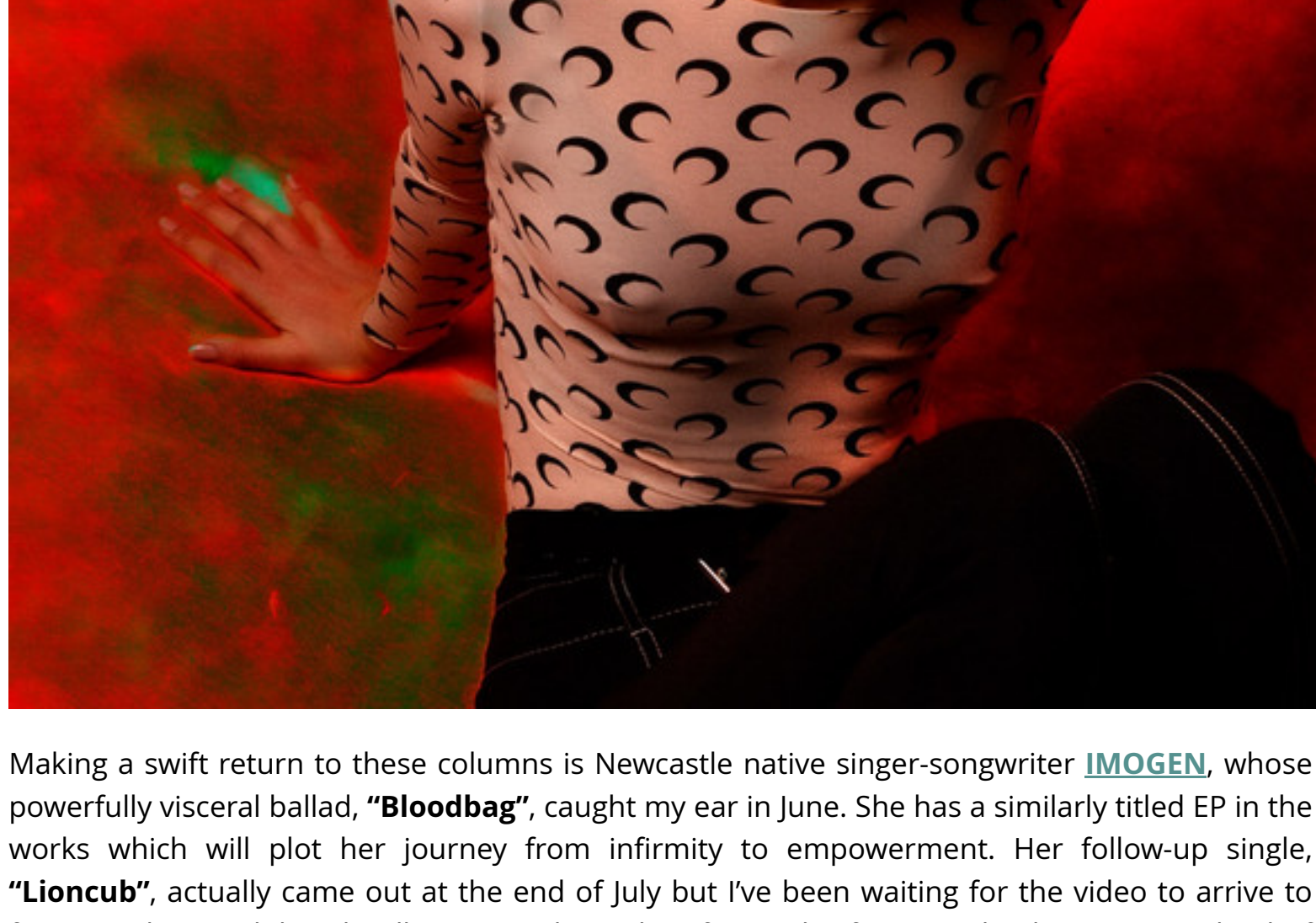
**Let's face it. August hasn't been a great month.** Firstly, the extreme weather patterns threatening across the planet; one person's flood being another's wildfire. Then the IPCC's frankly terrifying report which describes clearly and unequivocally the impact of man-made climate change. Now we have a grave situation unfolding in Afghanistan amid blind protestations that we didn't really see it coming; a scarcely credible position given the laser-like ability of satellite imagery allied to GPS-driven data to alert defence organisations and their governments to just about anything. As individuals, it is easy to feel powerless in the face of all this and more.



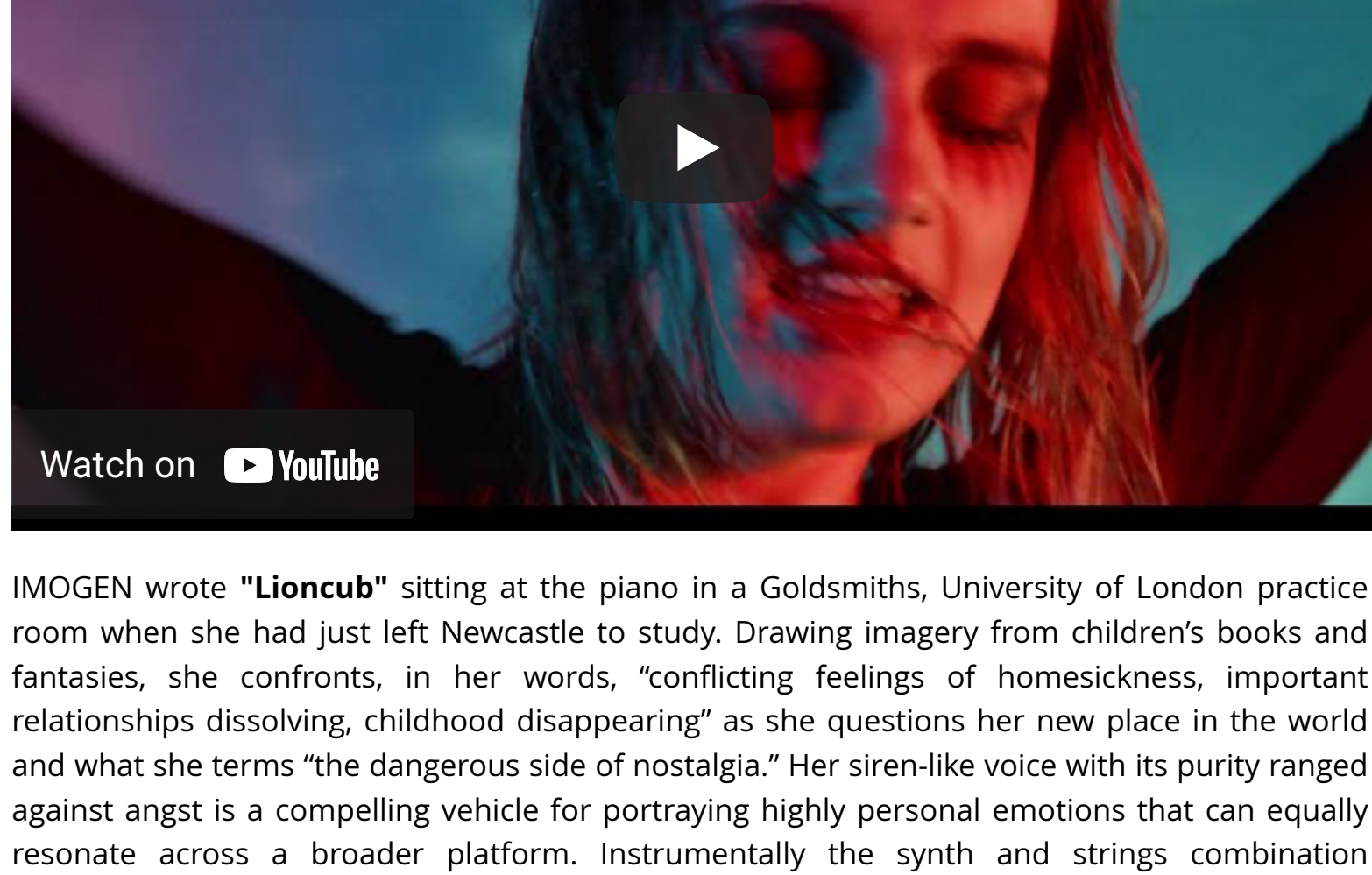
Songs, with their capacity to make sense of the human condition as much as to entertain, assuage or distract, are probably among the best things we have right now. They may not heal the planet or liberate the newly oppressed but where there is music, there remains hope for better days; for lessons really learned and micro steps that make a proverbial difference that is otherwise just talked about it. We can keep faith when there is music as stimulating as that purveyed by electro duo, *Machina X*. I first encountered the geographically distanced pairing of Annie from Sheffield and Cyrus, over in Yangan, in the run-up to Christmas 2020, if you can call it that, via the release of the magical, seasonal reverie of *"Wolves"*.



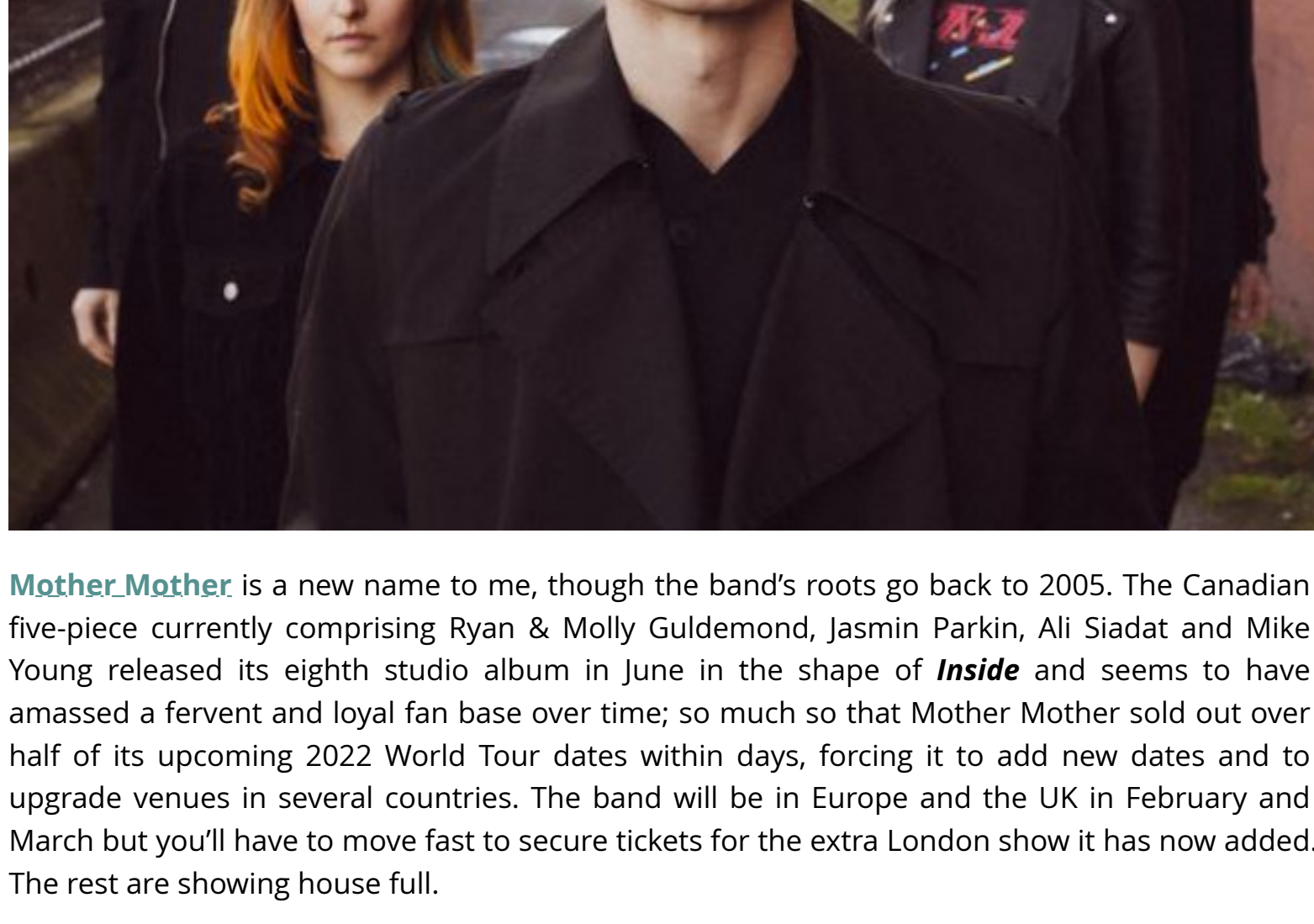
Machina X has returned with a new single **"Belong to the Night"**, a beautifully reflective piece that forms part of an impending five-track EP which conceptually will draw parallels with the five stages of grief, acknowledging that these are part of life and so not easily sidestepped. Grief changes us as people yet we can still control how we move on from it. **"Belong to the Night"** begins with softly resonant piano over which Annie's calming vocal is lyrically regretful yet strangely therapeutic. The changes in pace allied to sparkling synths and mellow beats are beautifully handled and the unusual phrasing and harmonies in the choruses really entrance. "Happy endings only happen... to other people" sings Annie; a bittersweet sentiment that we trust she can now put behind her.



Making a swift return to these columns is Newcastle native singer-songwriter *IMOGEN*, whose powerfully visceral ballad, **"Bloodbag"**, caught my ear in June. She has a similarly titled EP in the works which will plot her journey from infirmity to empowerment. Her follow-up single, **"Lioncub"**, actually came out at the end of July but I've been waiting for the video to arrive to feature it here. While "Bloodbag" was about the aftermath of surgery leading to some kind of renewal, "Lioncub" takes its cue from the emotional transition from adolescence to adulthood.



IMOGEN wrote **"Lioncub"** sitting at the piano in a Goldsmiths, University of London practice room when she had just left Newcastle to study. Drawing imagery from children's books and fantasies, she confronts, in her words, "conflicting feelings of homesickness, important relationships dissolving, childhood disappearing" as she questions her new place in the world and what she terms "the dangerous side of nostalgia." Her siren-like voice with its purity ranged against angst is a compelling vehicle for portraying highly personal emotions that can equally resonate across a broader platform. Instrumentally the synth and strings combination supported by supple electronic beats provide a stunning backdrop to it all.



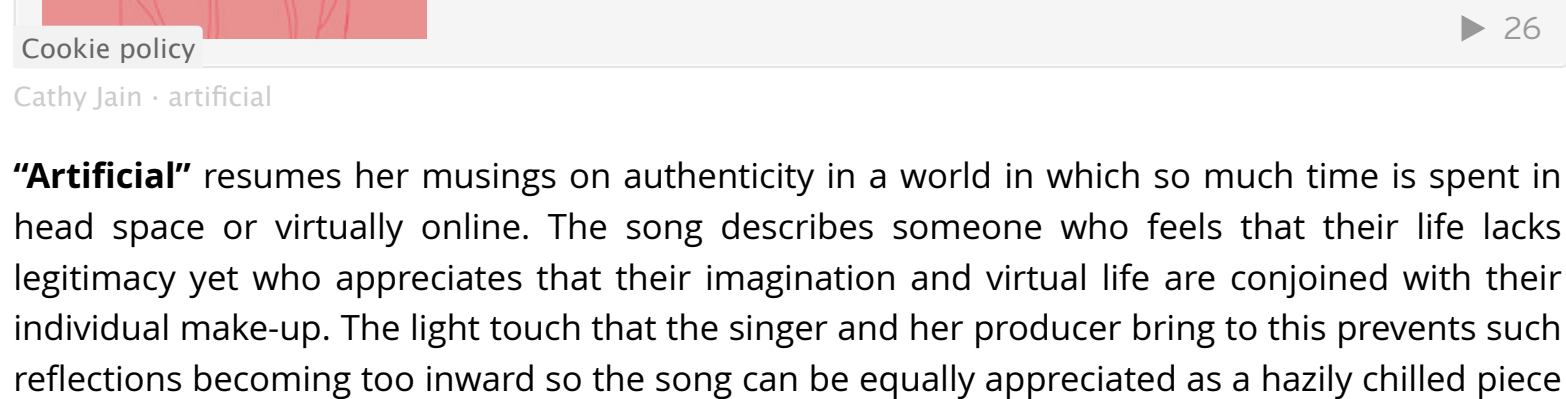
*Mother Mother* is a new name to me, though the band's roots go back to 2005. The Canadian five-piece currently comprising Ryan & Molly Guldemon, Jasmin Parkin, Ali Siadat and Mike Yamos released its eighth studio album in June in the shape of *Inside* and seems to have amassed a fervent and loyal fan base over time; so much so that Mother Mother sold out over half of its upcoming 2022 World Tour dates within days, forcing it to add new dates and to upgrade venues in several countries. The band will be in Europe and the UK in February and March but you'll have to move fast to secure tickets for the extra London show it has now added. The rest are showing house full.



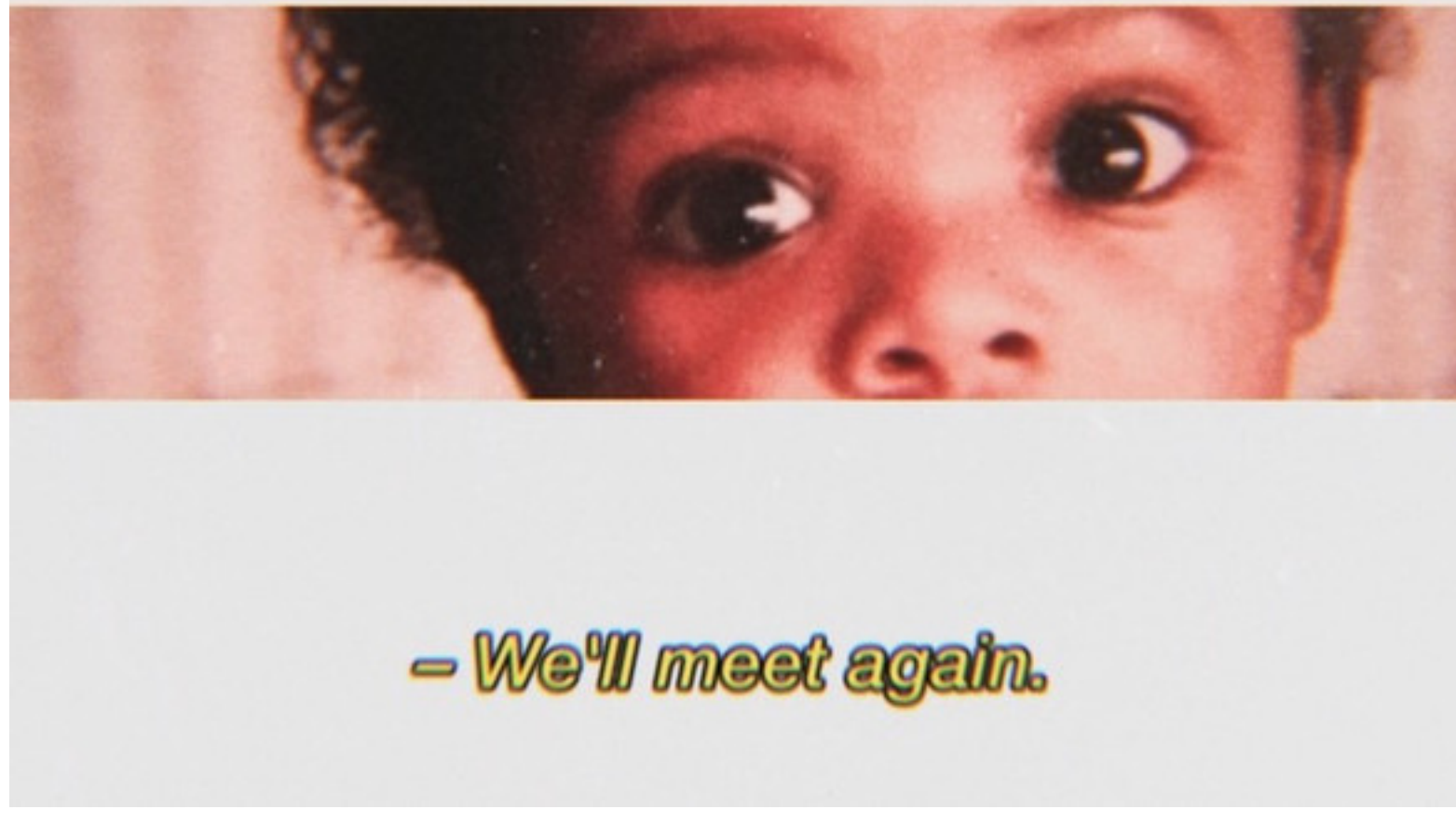
Taken from the latest album, **"The Knack"** is a great introduction to this energetic and impassioned alt-rock outfit. As the album title, *Inside*, suggests, the whole album is a product of the pandemic in that it deals with the self and the relationships we have with ourselves. "The Knack" is the sole representative in the romantic love stakes and casts a sly, slacker eye over the myth that you don't need to work at it, just get the knack. Whatever; something that just seems to have happened rather than was remotely envisaged. I was amused by the discovery that there are lists out there titled "TikTok songs that are actually good". It was less of a surprise that Mother Mother was on them.



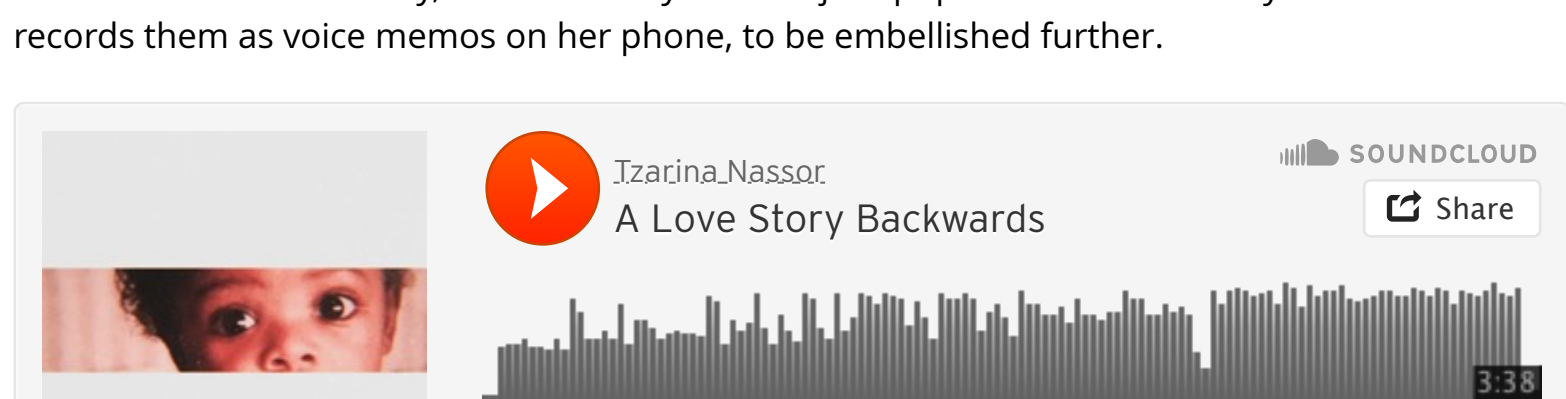
We have previously signposted the exceptional promise of *Cathy Jain* via her last two singles, **"Green Screen"** and **"Cool Kid"**. I am pleased to report she is back with a new song, **"Artificial"**, and we can now expect her similarly titled debut EP on 5 November. Fireworks will indeed follow. Akin to Machina X, the singer works in a remote partnership; hers with multimedia artiste and producer **Heron @ Crackles Analogue**, currently working in Goa. Though she has just turned 17, *Cathy Jain* continues her impressive progress towards assured pop stardom with radio support and a recently acclaimed appearance at Latitude Festival.



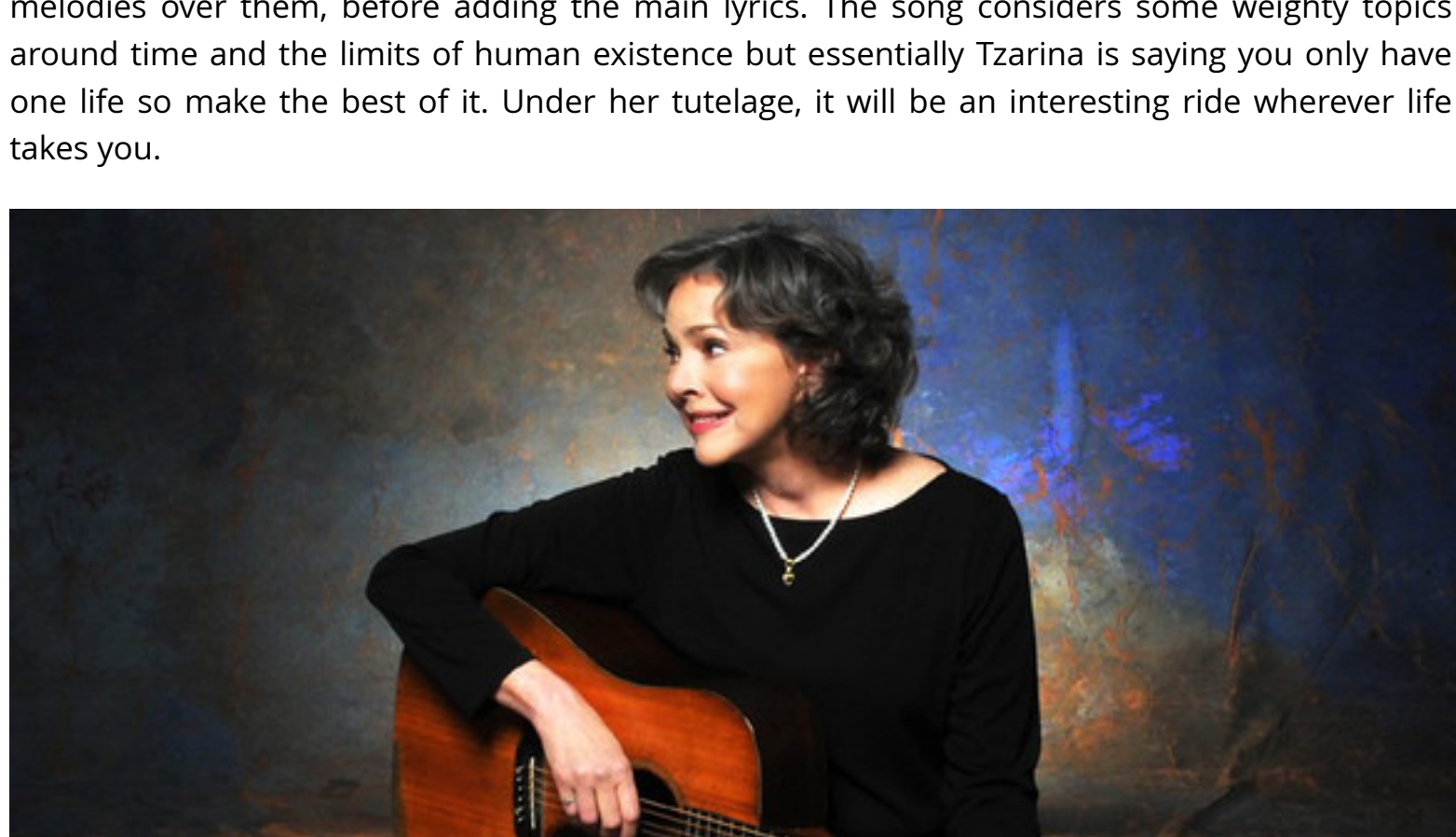
**"Artificial"** resumes her musings on authenticity in a world in which so much time is spent in head space or virtually online. The song describes someone who feels that their life lacks legitimacy yet who appreciates that their imagination and virtual life are conjoined with their individual make-up. The light touch that the singer and her producer bring to this prevents such reflections becoming too inward so the song can be equally appreciated as a hazily chilled piece of music. Cathy Jain has a fine ear for melody and a natural, instinctive flow that is fast establishing her as a distinctive artiste who speaks eloquently for her generation.



Another emerging talent we introduced, this time back in April, is North London singer-songwriter and DIY producer *Tzarina Nassor*, whose engaging self-produced track, **"House on Fire"** garnered some positive radio plays and responses. Her highly individual cross-genre sound is complemented by how she spills out her poetic lyrics in a stream-of-consciousness fashion. She constructs some songs by improvising with different patches, synths, samples and instruments. Alternatively, a tune and lyrics can just pop into her head fully formed and she records them as voice memos on her phone, to be embellished further.

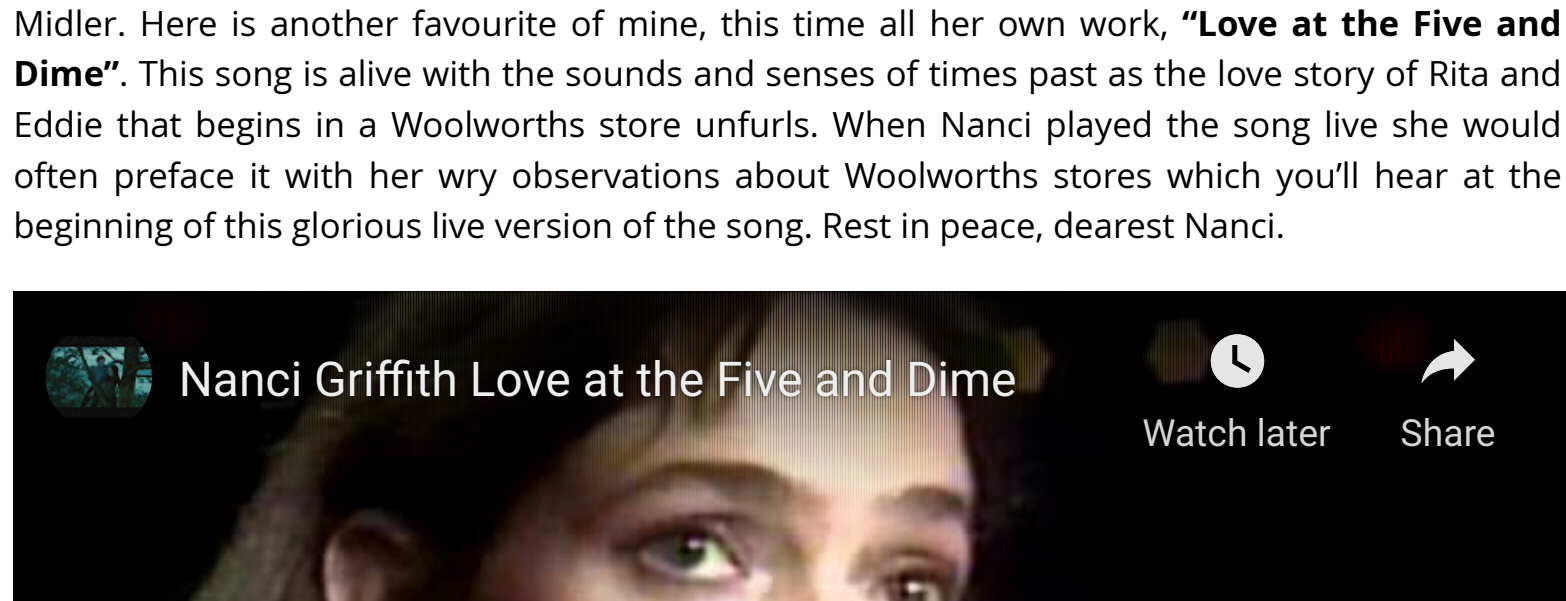


**"A love story backwards"** is the product of the improvisation route, finding some sounds she liked on her keyboard and manipulating them until she had the entire instrumental track finished in one obsessive day. Following that she looped sections of the song and improvised melodies over them, before adding the main lyrics. The song considers some weighty topics around time and the limits of human existence but essentially Tzarina is saying you only have one life so make the best of it. Under her tutelage, it will be an interesting ride wherever life takes you.



From memory to the life lived. I couldn't let today's edition go without showing respect to the memory of the great Texan singer, *Nanci Griffith*, whose untimely death aged 68 was touched after we published last week's Fifty3 Fridays. She was a singer and songwriter who touched everyday sensibilities in a deceptively simple yet telling way; a storyteller who could really take you there.

I remember buying *The Best of Nanci Griffith*, a 19-track compilation, in 1993 and particularly loved **"From a Distance"** from the very first play. I had always assumed it was one of her own compositions, although it was actually a Julie Gold song that went on to be a big hit for Bette Midler. Here is another favourite of mine, this time all her own work, **"Love at the Five and Dime"**. This song is alive with the sounds and senses of times past as the love story of Rita and Eddie that begins in a Woolworths store unfurls. When Nanci played the song live she would often preface it with her wry observations about Woolworths stores which you'll hear at the beginning of this glorious live version of the song. Rest in peace, dearest Nanci.



## FIFTY3 champions outstanding new music through Fifty3 Fridays and occasional features.

Music is a great passion of mine. In my teenage years I was an avid record collector and concert goer. Stints as a booking agent, running folk clubs, promoting gigs and even a crack at artiste management followed. While it never became my main occupation, music was always on my personal radar.

During the past 11 years I have written for the leading US music website *Consequence of Sound* and breakthrough act site, *BestNewBands*. I am a judge for Glastonbury Festival's Emerging Talent Competition and have reviewed the festival for both the above sites.

Nothing gives me more pleasure than unearthing good, original new music and championing independent musicians. You'll find many of them on this site alongside the occasional legend of times past and I hope they will bring you as much joy as they give me.

**Tony Hardy**  
**UPCOMING GIGS**

Selected dates in the London area

Mon 6 Dec: Lucy Dacus, Banquet Records Instore, Kingston  
**POSTPONED**

Wed 22 Dec: Tony Moore presents AWAKE, The Bedford, Balham

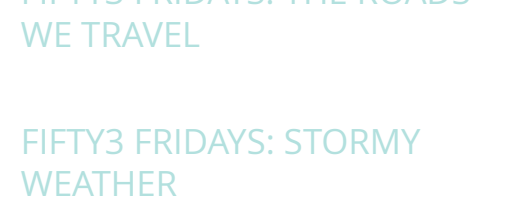
Mon 17 Jan: Penelope Isles, Banquet Records Instore, Kingston

Mon 29 Jan: A. A. Williams, Bush Hall, London W12

Tues 2 Feb: Barbara, Blandin Detweiler, The Bedford, Balham

[banquetrecords.com](https://banquetrecords.com) See the Events page for all live shows in Kingston

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